

To: Executive Board
From: Sally Engle Merry, Chair, Committee on Scientific Communication

Annual Report 2007

April 7, 2008

Dear Executive Board:

This has been a very busy and productive year for the Committee on Scientific Communication, focusing largely on the publications side of the committee's responsibilities.

AA Editor

In May 2007, the editor of the *American Anthropologist* resigned and the CSC formed a search committee to look for a new editor. Tom Boellstorff agreed to serve as editor for an interim period, to be considered for permanent editor in the fall if he decided he was interested. The Search Committee, chaired by Ellen Lewin, sent out a notice for applicants and issued invitations to apply to individuals the committee thought would do a good job. The Search Committee, consisting of the CSC and a few additional members, considered several applications and interviewed two candidates at the Nov. 2007 meeting. The committee decided to ask Tom Boellstorff to continue the editorship for a full term.

CFPEP

The newly constituted publications committee, The Committee on the Future of Print and Electronic and Publications (CFPEP), under the leadership of Alisse Waterston, began its work on publications by establishing general principles on publication policy. They decided the following principles, which the CSC approved unanimously at its May 2007 meeting:

Motion 6: The committee moved that the principles be approved verbatim:

1. Commitment to a diverse publishing portfolio (to ensure a robust anthropology, and in recognition that such diversity is a strength of the discipline and of the AAA); and
2. Commitment to finding and developing a mechanism to ensure the survival and sustenance of Section made financially vulnerable by the transition to AnthroSource.

Transition in Publishers

By late 2006, it was clear that some sections were facing bankruptcy as a result of the publishing arrangements with Univ. of California Press, which provided publication services for a fee. The EB authorized a loan program for sections facing financial

difficulties during the transition period, but by May 2007, despite several consultations with the publishing department, no sections had chosen to take this offer. However, there were constructive exchanges between sections and the then -AAA director of publications Jasper Simons. Some sections made changes in their editorial offices that eased their financial burdens.

Nevertheless, the AAA staff decided that it was necessary to consider changing publishers at the expiration of the contract with Univ of California Press in Dec 2007, The AAA issued an RFP, with the assistance of a consultant. During July 2007, members of the CSC met with several presses to hear their proposals. After considerable discussion and debate, the CSC and EB decided to accept the Wiley-Blackwell offer, to be implemented beginning in January 2008. At the May 2007 meeting, the CSC decided to continue with the previous allocation formula for AnthroSource revenues, but to revisit the question of allocation formulas again next year.

The transition to Wiley-Blackwell raised several difficult issues: how to allocate revenues, how to determine changes in specifications for journals, and how to initiate new journals. CFPEP tackled the first issue through a series of interviews with section leaders and organizing a conference call with section leadership. It developed a recommended allocation formula that was approved by the CSC and EB in early 2008.

In late 2007, the AAA hired a consultant to model various formulas. CSC approved developing a section advisor process and developed a list of section advisors who agreed to consult on these issues through email and phone conference calls. By the end of December, 2007, the consultant was working on a report on allocation principles and the section advisor body was ready for consultation.

In discussions among the heads of CFPEP, CSC, and the AAA publishing department, it was agreed that the process of making decisions concerning the changes in publication needed to be open and participatory. Although this approach was more time consuming and onerous than simply making a technically-based decision, we are convinced that it won greater support for decisions and diminished the distrust and suspicion of sections toward the AAA.

The CSC tackled the problem of specifications changes in early 2008 and adopted a similar consultative approach. So far, these added efforts appear to be paying strong dividends in terms of diminished suspicion and distrust.

Other Issues

In addition to publishing issues, the CSC considered the report of a member survey of the 2006 meeting and debated future conference venues.

CSC also discussed the substance of AAA special publications. It offered exchanges of advertising space in support of the new popular journal, Anthropology Now.

CSC has been principally engaged with shepherding the new publication agreement and selecting a new editor for AA during this year. In the future, it plans to focus on the future possibilities of AnthroSource as a member benefit and repository of materials as well as a publication platform. We have many ideas about how to do this, but have had to postpone them till more pressing issues were resolved.

The committee has a substantial set of responsibilities, but it has had the resources to carry them out this year. In particular, it has received strong support from Oona Schmid, the Director of Publishing at AAA, who has worked well with the committee. Once the transition to electronic publishing and to Wiley-Blackwell is solidified, the CSC may be able to turn to other issues such as the Annual Meeting and the future of AnthroSource. However, this has been an important year and the committee has worked well together in helping the association to move forward with its publishing program.